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Pushed by national politics or pulled by localism? Voting for independent local parties in the Netherlands

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ABSTRACT
This study examines why citizens in the Netherlands vote for independent local parties. These are parties that run in municipal council elections, but do not run in elections at higher levels. This article examines a number of expectations: namely that voters vote for these parties out dissatisfaction with established parties, that they do so because they have a 'localist' political orientation or that they do so because their own national party is not running in the municipal elections. More support is found for the idea that voters vote for local parties because they are pushed away by national parties (either because they do not participate in some municipalities or because voters distrust them) than for the idea that voters vote for local parties for positive reasons, such as a localist political orientation. This article examines two surveys concerning voting behaviour in the 2014 Dutch municipal elections.

KEYWORDS Independent local parties; voting behaviour; the Netherlands; political trust

1. Introduction

This study examines why citizens vote for independent local parties. These are parties that run in municipal elections but do not run in elections at higher levels, specifically the national level. There is limited systematic research into these parties and the most advanced research to date is focused on organisational and institutional features (Reiser and Holtmann 2008). To the knowledge of the author, there is no study that identifies the motivations why voters vote for independent local parties. The core question of this article is *under what conditions do voters vote for independent local parties.*

Research into the voters of independent local parties is relevant for two reasons. First, because they are often linked to political dissatisfaction (e.g., Boogers and Voerman 2010, 79). Yet, there is no empirical evidence that the

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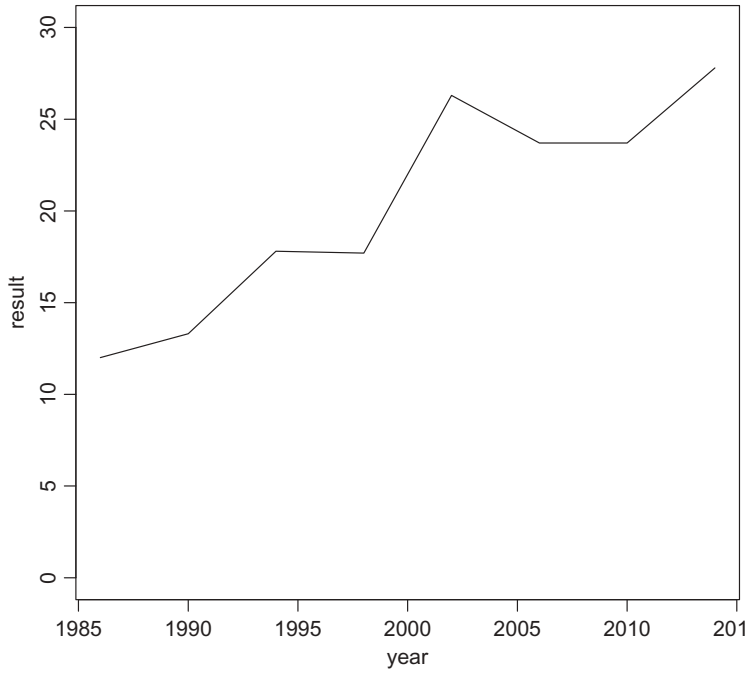

Figure 1. Results of independent local parties in the Netherlands 1986-2014.

motivation to vote for these parties is distrust of established parties, instead of 'localism' (Copus and Wingfeld 2014) or the even the absence of some national parties. This article tests these different notions. Is the success of these parties based on pull factors related to the appeal of these parties or factors pushing voters away from established political parties?

Second, because in many countries these parties are on the rise and are an important political player at the municipal level (Boogers and Voerman 2010). These parties are larger in municipal councils than established national parties in German states such as Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria, Austrian states like Voralberg and Tyrol, and in countries such as the Netherlands (Angenendt 2015; Ennser-Jedenastik and Hansen 2013). Why people vote for independent local parties is as relevant a question as why they vote for Christian democrats, social democrats or liberals. These parties garner as much support. This article will focus on the Dutch case, but as it will be argued in greater detail below, it seems credible that the results found here may be relevant for a number of countries that have a similar electoral system and a similar party system at the local level. This is especially the case for the Nordic countries, Germany and Austria.

The labelling of independent local parties differs from study to study and from country to country. Some studies call these 'non-national parties' (Erlingsson 2008). Many studies do not use the 'party' label, but instead

refer to 'non-partisan lists' (Aars and Ringkjøb 2005, 167), 'independent local lists' (Holtman 2008), 'local lists of independent candidates', (Åberg and Ahlberger 2015, 813), 'non-partisan groups' (Angenendt 2015) or 'citizens' groups' (De Almeida 2007, 233). The reason for this is that in some countries, such as Germany, the label 'party' legally is reserved for those groups that field lists for national elections (Angenendt 2015, 128). This study will use the term 'independent local party', as these organisations are 'parties' in the sense that they field lists of candidates for elections (Ware 1996, 5). These groups are 'local' in the sense that they are organised exclusively at the municipal level.[1] They are 'independent' in the sense that they are not affiliated in any way with national political parties.

This article will have the following structure: first, it will discuss the theoretical expectations of why voters may choose to vote for an independent local party. Second, it will introduce the case that will be the focus of this study. Third, it will discuss the two data sets that will be used to study the phenomenon. Next the results will be presented. Finally, the implications of the research will be discussed.

2. Theory

This study will examine three explanations of why voters vote for independent local parties: dissatisfaction with established parties, localism and the absence of national parties in some municipal council elections.

2.1. *Political distrust*

The first pattern that may underlie why voters vote for an independent local party is because they no longer have confidence in established political parties. The link between political distrust and independent local parties has been touched upon by a large number of authors: the idea is that independent local political parties are successful 'when established alternatives fail' as Hauss and Rayside (1978) propose in their seminal study of new party formation. Lago and Martínez (2011) show that in Spanish regions new parties, often independent from national political parties, form where earlier citizens have shown to be dissatisfied with politics. Independent local parties have often been founded by citizens who are themselves dissatisfied with the 'arrogance' of the 'established system' (Zouridis, Tops, and Voerman 1994, 79). In their study of Norwegian independent local lists, Aars and Ringkjøb (2007, 4) observe that three out of four independent local parties were founded out of dissatisfaction with established political parties. In their study of Dutch independent local parties, Boogers and Voerman (2010, 85) characterised a quarter of these parties as 'protest parties'. These independent politicians are often more distrustful of national politics, the national parliament and established political

parties compared to other politicians (Copus and Wingfeld 2014, 661; Gendźwiłł 2012, 510). Studies also point to the appeals these independent local parties make, that are often characterised as populist or anti-political, articulating popular dissatisfaction with established political parties (Angenendt 2015, 135; Boogers and Voerman 2010, 78; Holtman 2008, 13). These appeals are populist in the sense that they make a distinction between the homogeneous and virtuous people and corrupt elite and argue that instead of the being controlled by the elite, politics should be an expression of the political will (Mudde 2004, 543). In their analysis of the manifestos of a selected set of independent local parties in the Netherlands, Boogers, Lucardie, and Voerman (2007) found that the only ideological trait all the selected parties shared was their populism. As will be discussed below, the history of Dutch populism at the national level is intrinsically linked to the history of local parties. Therefore, it is credible that one dividing line these parties use to mobilise voters is the division between the establishment and anti-establishment (Boogers and Voerman 2010, 86). By casting their vote not for an established political party, but for an independent local party, voters can express their overall dissatisfaction with mainstream politics, whether national or local level (Boogers and Voerman 2010, 79–80).

(1) **Political Trust Hypothesis**: The lower the political trust of voters, the more likely they are to vote for an independent local party.

2.2. *Localism*

Independent local political parties may not only be protest parties. Many can also be characterised by a 'localist' orientation (Boogers and Voerman 2010, 85). As independent local political parties, they may represent the specific needs of the local community, unconstrained by the ideologies of national political parties. As Åberg and Ahlberger (2015, 817) put it succinctly: 'the business of municipal parties is the locality'. The local community's needs can take many forms: in some specific cases these independent local parties are founded to save the local hospital or to improve the traffic congestion in their town (Bottom & Crow, 2011, 220). These parties may mobilise voters in defence of the interest of their local community with its own traditions and idiosyncrasies against the metropolitan expansionism (Åberg and Ahlberger 2015, 817). They may also be formed to express a 'Not In My Backyard' sentiment towards environmental pollution (Åberg and Ahlberger 2015, 817; Bottom & Crow, 2011, 222). In their study of independent local political parties in the Netherlands, Boogers and Voerman (2010, 85) characterise a majority of them as 'localist'. In line with this, Aars and Ringkjøb (2007, 4) show that more than half of the Norwegian independent political parties were founded in order to

rally the local community. As such these parties may mobilise voters on the dividing line between the local and national level (Boogers and Voerman 2010, 88). Copus and Wingfeld (2014, 664) develop a more specific conception of localism: they understand it as support for the interest of their community and support for autonomy for the municipal level. We follow this conceptualisation: localism is understood as support autonomy for the municipal level and support for the local community, which is operationalised as identification with this level.

(2) **Local Autonomy Hypothesis**: The more voters favour local autonomy, the more likely they are to vote for an independent local party.

(3) **Identification Hypothesis**: The more voters identify with local polities, the more likely they are to vote for an independent local party.

Because of this localist orientation, these parties are independent of the ideological left or right (Åberg and Ahlberger 2015, 815; Copus and Wingfeld 2014, 654). At the same time, there is considerable programmatic and ideological heterogeneity among independent local parties (Angenendt 2015, 127; Boogers and Voerman 2010, 84). This heterogeneity means that it will be difficult to catch the reasons why voters vote for an independent local political party in a national survey as this choice may often reflect specific local interests and needs, but also the ideological orientation of these independent local parties: they may be more left or right-wing, more conservative or more progressive from municipality to municipality. It would be notable if despite this heterogeneity, one would find a consistent ideological orientation among the supporters of independent local parties.

2.3. *Supply side*

In the literature on independent local political parties, one thing is specifically clear: the smaller municipalities are, the stronger independent local political parties are and conversely the weaker national political parties are. This pattern has been found in Denmark (Kjaer and Elklit 2010, 439), Italy (Vampa 2016, 583), Germany (Göhlert et al. 2008), Norway (Aars and Ringkjøb 2005, 172) and the Netherlands (Janssen and Korsten 2003). On the one hand, national parties are less likely to compete in smaller municipalities, leaving space for independent local parties, for a number of reasons: first, larger communities are more likely to be heterogeneous. More heterogeneous populations will see a more complex cleavage structure (Kjaer and Elklit 2010, 437). Therefore, *ceteris paribus*, national political parties will compete in larger municipalities where their own specific electoral niches are represented. Second, there is a higher natural threshold in smaller municipalities; this makes it less interesting for parties with small

constituencies in these municipalities to compete (Kjaer and Elklit 2010, 439). Third, winning larger cities is strategically more important for national political parties (Vampa 2016, 583). Finally, national parties are more likely to reach larger towns to recruit members (Vampa 2016, 583). On the other side, it is relatively easy to form an independent local party in a smaller local municipality building on local networks in towns where everyone knows each other (Janssen and Korsten 2003).

All in all, these arguments are not as much about size of municipalities but about the extent to which established parties participate in local elections: the lower the numbers of established national parties competing in a municipality are, the more space there is for independent local parties, as there are more 'floating' voters. It is more costly and less advantageous for national parties to compete in small municipalities; therefore, this phenomenon is most prevalent in smaller municipalities. As this study focuses on the individual level, one can reword this hypothesis for the voter level:

(4) **Supply-Side Hypothesis**: Those who voted for a national party that did not run in the municipal elections in their municipality are more likely to vote for an independent local party than those who voted for a national party that does run in their municipality.

Still, in addition to this 'mechanical' effect of the supply side that may underlie why independent local parties are stronger in smaller municipalities, there may be a residual effect of the size on the likelihood that voters vote for local parties, which will be included as a control variable.

3. Country selection and description

Municipal electoral politics is located within particular cultural and institutional contexts. The reasons why voters vote for independent local parties in one country cannot be immediately transferred to another country. Careful selection of the country may yield results that are relevant for other countries that are sufficiently similar. This article examines the reasons why voters vote for independent local parties. This study focuses on West European countries that use a list-electoral system to elect their municipal councils. This study examines a West European democracy as opposed to more recently democratised countries from Central and Eastern European countries, because in many of these countries the formation of independent local parties is tied to the specificities of the patterns of democratisation (Gendźwiłł 2012, 505) or systemic instability in electoral results due to a lack of institutionalisation of the supply side. This study focuses on a country that uses a list system as opposed to candidates being elected with a personal mandate or mixed systems, like the UK or France, because in the latter

kind of systems the line between an independent councillor and a representative for an independent local party is more difficult to make.

Table 1 lists all West European countries that meet the three criteria listed above, drawing the electoral systems from Van Der Kolk (2007). This study will focus on a country that is in top in terms of the support for independent local parties, from this list, because this gives one the ample number of respondents that actually has voted for independent local parties. The highest level of support for independent local parties can be found in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands. The Netherlands is preferred over the former two for a number of reasons: in Belgium, the situation is complicated by the different types of lists running in local elections (Steyvers et al. 2008, 171). In Belgium, instead of running under the banner of a national party, local branches of national parties often form cartels with branches of other parties or field a list with candidates from a national and independent local party. Moreover, the situation in Belgium is made more complex by the differences between the regions of Flanders, Brussels and Wallonia. In Germany, the situation is complicated by the fact that municipal elections are a state responsibility and therefore different electoral systems are used in different states, including mixed electoral systems in some states (Van Der Kolk 2007, 164) and these elections are not held at the same moment. This limits the ability to perform a single national level survey of these voters.

Therefore, the Netherland is selected to study voting for independent local parties. The Netherlands is a unitary state. Municipal councils are elected every 4 years. All elections in all municipalities are held on the same day.[2] The electoral system is list proportional representation with no threshold other than the natural threshold due to assembly size (ranging therefore from 3%

Table 1. Share of the vote for non-national parties.

Country	Share of the vote for non-national parties	Election year	Source
Austria[b]	14.9%	1985–2009	Ennser-Jedenastik and Hansen (2013)
Belgium			
Wallonia[c]	59.1%	2000	Steyvers et al. (2008, 181)
Flanders[c]	33.7%	2000	Steyvers et al. (2008, 181)
Denmark	5.0%	2013	Bjørnager (2013)
Finland	2.1%	2017	Yle.fi (2017)
Germany[a]	35.5%	2003–2008	Angenendt (2015, 130)
Netherlands	27.8%	2014	Verkiezingsuitslagen (2014)
Portugal	6.9%	2013	CNE (2013)
Norway	4.6%	2015	Valgregultalt.no (2015)
Spain	17.4%	2015	Infoelectoral.mir.es (2015)
Sweden	4.1%	2014	Val.se (2014)

[a]Results of lists not part of national parties in the municipal elections in the most recent year before 2008 for the city councils in the German states excluding Bremen, Hamburg and Berlin.
[b]Average result of independent local lists in the municipal elections between municipal elections 1985 and 2009.
[c]Result for local lists in the 2000 municipal elections in the constituencies in which they run. Wallonia includes cartel lists of multiple national parties.

to 11%). This makes the system relatively open to the formation of new and independent local parties. The recent history of independent local parties is intertwined with the history of populism in the Netherlands. Historically, independent local parties were strong in the Catholic south. In this region, the Catholic People's Party (*Katholieke Volkspartij*) got more than 80% of the vote in the national elections in many municipalities. It chose not to compete in many municipal elections leaving it to local lists unless other national parties chose to compete in those regions (Janssen and Korsten 2003). As the Catholic party declined in the 1960s and 1970s in national elections, other national parties began competing in these municipalities and therefore this practice of non-interference crumbled and with it these local parties. In the 1990s there was a revival of independent local parties, as can be seen in Figure 1. In parallel national elections saw large volatility. Local parties were formed in a number of larger municipalities. Many ran under the banner '*Leefbaar*' (Liveable) but without forming a national organisation (Lucardie and Voerman 2012, 71–72). Before that independent local parties were mainly concentrated in rural areas. In 1993 *Leefbaar Hilversum* was founded. In 1998 they were followed by *Leefbaar Utrecht*. The rhetoric of both parties had populist characteristics (Lucardie and Voerman 2012, 72–74). In 1999 the two parties took the initiative to form a national party, *Leefbaar Nederland* (Lucardie and Voerman 2012, 76–77). This party however did not have formal ties to these independent local parties. In 2002 the new party recruited Pim Fortuyn a former Rotterdam sociology professor and a critic of the Dutch immigration and civic integration policy as its top candidate (Lucardie and Voerman 2012, 79). Fortuyn and the founders of *Leefbaar Nederland* disagreed over the party's course, specifically on the issue of immigration (Lucardie and Voerman 2012, 84). Pim Fortuyn split and formed his own party, the *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* (List Pim Fortuyn, LPF), which focused on immigration. Fortuyn was killed days before the 2002 election and the LPF won 17% of the seats, unprecedented for a new party in the Netherlands. LN won 2% of the vote. With that right-wing populism had won a permanent position in the Dutch national parliament as a descendant of this wave of independent local parties in the 1990s. In 2006 the leaderless LPF lost representation in the Tweede Kamer, but in that election a new anti-immigrant party, the Freedom Party (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*), immediately occupied that void. The Freedom Party did not contest municipal elections until 2010 and it only ran in two municipalities, leaving space for independent local parties. Meanwhile independent local parties continued to grow. In the 2002 municipal elections the parties won 26% of the vote, including more than a third of the votes in Rotterdam, the second city of the Netherlands. They were the largest political group in all municipal councils combined. In 2016 the 2002 result was topped: the independent local parties won 28% of the vote.

The story below will feature some of the national Dutch parties: the main established parties Christian-Democratic Appeal (*Christen-Democratisch Appèl*), the right-wing Liberal Party (*Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie*), the social-democratic Labour Party (*Partij van de Arbeid*). On the anti-establishment side there is the right-wing populist Freedom Party, but also the left-wing populist Socialist Party (*Socialistische Partij*), the pensioners' party 50Plus and the animal-advocacy party Animals Party (*Partij voor de Dieren*). The Netherlands also has small protestant parties, which are relevant for our discussion, the Political Reformed Party (*Staatkundige Gereformeerde Partij*, SGP) and the ChristianUnion (*ChristenUnie*).

By selecting the Netherlands as a case, we also delineate for what kind of cases our results are relevant. These are likely to be countries that have a similar electoral system, party system and history of democracy. This means that context for independent local parties in the Netherlands is similar to that of German independent local lists, and although these parties are larger in size in the Netherlands, the situation also is similar for Austria, Portugal, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. Given the complexities of the Spanish systems with its strong regionalist parties (Lago and Martínez 2011), it is less likely that the results can be generalised to this system. The results are also less generalisable to more recently democratised systems in Central and Eastern Europe or systems where councillors get a personal mandate instead of a party mandate (the UK, France, Ireland and Italy). In some countries using a personal mandate system such as Australia and New Zealand, independent local parties and independent candidates dominate these elections, due to the norm that local and national politics should remain apart. A study of support for independent local parties in a system where national parties also compete in elections is unlikely to be relevant for understanding voting behaviour in such systems.

4. Methods

This article employs two data sets to examine the hypotheses. Both have their own strengths and weaknesses. The first is the Dutch Local Election Study (DLES) (Van Der Meer and Van Der Kolk 2016) and the second is the Region North Panel (RNP). The DLES was a study organised by the same organisation that organises the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies. It uses the internet panel of the Longitudinal Internet Studies for Social Science (LISS). The LISS consists out of a representative sample of the entire Dutch voting age population as respondents are drawn from the Central Bureau of Statistics database of the Dutch population (for more information see Van Der Meer and Van Der Kolk 2016). The study has a response rate of 82%. The DLES also offers a large number of additional opinion variables that can be used as control variables. For this research project this DLES has two main disadvantages: first, the LISS

prizes anonymity of respondents. One rule is that the municipality in which respondents live cannot be derived from the data. This is problematic for the supply-side hypothesis, which requires one to know which parties ran in the municipal elections in the municipality where respondents live. Second, it was held in 2016 with respondents recalling their vote in 2014 elections. Appendix 1 lists the full questions of the items used from the DLES.

The second study used is the RNP. This is a self-registered internet panel exclusively oriented at the three northern provinces in the Netherlands. The response rate of the RNP was 38%. The RNP is not a representative sample of the Dutch population or even the population in this region. Compared to the LISS men and higher educated voters are overrepresented (see Tables 1 and 2). From a methodological perspective, the DLES is far superior. The RNP, however, has two advantages over the DLES: this study was held in March 2014, starting the day after the local elections. Moreover, in this study one can link respondents to municipalities and therefore the parties that ran in those elections. All in all, RNP is meant as a robustness check on the DLES, in particular where it comes to the mechanics of the supply-side hypothesis. Appendix 2 lists the full questions of the items used from the RNP.

The dependent variable is the choice for an independent local party in the 2014 municipal elections in the Netherlands. In the DLES this was operationalised as whether respondents voted for a national party or not (operationalisation performed by the DLES coders).[3] Do note however that the DLES has a good representative sample of the Dutch population and a fair share of voters did not turn out for the elections (46%), these voters have missing values. In the RNP the question only concerned the 2014 elections. Here, voting for a local party is operationalised as voting for a party that was active in only one municipality. Given the binary nature of the dependent variable, logistic regression is employed.

To test the political trust hypothesis, a measure of political trust is employed. Trust in the municipal and national government is included separately in analyses as well together to measure political trust in general. The DLES has three items on trust in the national government (combining items on satisfaction with national democracy and trust in the government and parliament), which are taken together as a scale. It has five items on trust in the municipal government (combining items on satisfaction with municipal democracy and trust in the municipal executive council, the mayor, municipal council and municipal councillors), which are also taken together. Combined these become an eight-item scale on general political trust. The fact that all these items can be combined in a scale implies that the two scales are likely to be highly correlated (Pearson's r is 0.68). The RNP has four items that can be taken together in a scale concerning trust in the national government and members of parliament, as well as four items that can be taken together to measure trust in the municipal

government and municipal councillors. These combine to an eight-item scale. The Pearson's *r* between the two scales is 0.38. To assess scalability, Mokken scaling was used. All these trust scales exceed basic requirements of scalability of a Loevinger's *H* of 0.3 (see Tables 2 and 3).

The local autonomy hypothesis can only be tested for the DLES, as the RNP did not include items on institutional design. The DLES asked respondents to indicate the importance they attached to the principle that 'municipalities can decide on many issues autonomously' and it asked respondents to assess to what extent they were satisfied with implementation of this principle in practice. Respondents made both assessments on a ten-point scale. The difference between the importance that voters attach to this and their assessment of the implementation is a good indication of to what extent they want more local autonomy.

To test the identification hypothesis, the DLES offers three variables that concern to what extent voters feel attached to their region, municipality and village/district to form a scale. These items scale well. In the RNP, identification was measured with an indicator developed by Moreno, Arriba, and Serrano (1998) to measure regional identification. It asks respondents whether they identify as exclusively Dutch or as their provincial demonym on five-point scale.

To test the supply-side hypothesis, the DLES is problematic because it does not report directly in which municipality respondents live. Therefore, the share of municipalities that the party the respondent voted for the 2012 election ran in during the 2014 municipal elections was calculated. This was weighted by voting age population. This is a proxy of the chance that the national party a respondent voted for is not running in the local election. Also note that as the DLES is a representative sample of the Dutch population and a quarter of eligible voters did not vote in the 2012 national elections, the values for those cases are missing. In the RNP one can check directly whether the party the respondent voted for in the 2012 national election actually ran in the 2014 municipal election in the municipality where the respondent resides. This is a more direct test of the hypothesis.

A number of control variables are added: the size of the municipality (in four categories),[4] gender (with male being one), year of birth and education level (split between those who graduated a research university or a university of applied sciences and those who did not) are included in both the RNP and DLES analyses. The DLES offers a number of additional political opinion variables: a two-item economic egalitarianism scale, a two-item new cultural scale, concerning issues such as immigration, and an item concerning the old cultural dimension, specifically closing shops on Sunday. The scales meet basic scaling requirements in terms of the Loevinger's *H* although the scales are weaker than the trust scales. All variables are standardised so that their maximum is one and their minimum is zero.

Table 2. Variables in the DLES.

	Mean	Median	Min.	Max.	SD	*H*	N_{items}	$N_{respondents}$	Low	High
Local vote	0.22	–	0.00	1.00	–	–	1	1691	National party	Local party
Political trust	0.55	0.67	0.00	1.00	0.17	0.61	8	1915	Dissatisfied	Satisfied
Local identification	0.58	0.67	0.00	1.00	0.22	0.57	5	2537	Low local identification	High local identification
National political trust	0.57	0.56	0.00	1.00	0.18	0.77	3	2396	Dissatisfied	Satisfied
Local political trust	0.54	0.58	0.00	1.00	0.19	0.62	5	1934	Dissatisfied	Satisfied
Economic dimension	0.64	0.75	0.00	1.00	0.21	0.33	2	2215	Inegalitarian	Egalitarian
New cultural dimension	0.63	0.63	0.00	1.00	0.19	0.31	2	2077	Conservative	Progressive
Old cultural dimension	0.70	0.75	0.00	1.00	0.26	–	1	2452	Conservative	Progressive
Party non-participation	0.30	0.10	0.00	1.00	0.35	–	1	2020	High participation of party voted for	Low participation of party voted for
Gender = Male	0.48	–	0.00	1.00	–	–	1	2643	Female	Male
Year of birth	0.54	0.56	0.00	1.00	–	–	1	2643	1900	1998
Density = Urban	0.42	–	0.00	1.00	–	–	1	2608	Rural	Urban
Education level = Higher	0.45	–	0.00	1.00	–	–	1	2643	Lower and middle	Higher
Support for local autonomy	0.49	0.50	0.00	1.00	0.09	–	2	1925	Local autonomy is less important than currently implemented	Local autonomy is more important than currently implemented

Table 3. Variables in the RNP.

Variable	Mean	Median	Min.	Max.	SD	*H*	N_{items}	$N_{respondents}$	Low	High
Local vote	0.31	–	0.00	1.00	–	–	1	2667	National party	Local party
Local identification	0.48	0.50	0.00	1.00	0.23	–	1	3041	Low local identification	High local identification
Political trust	0.50	0.52	0.00	1.00	0.16	0.40	8	2537	Dissatisfied	Satisfied
National political trust	0.38	0.33	0.00	1.00	0.23	0.63	4	2711	Dissatisfied	Satisfied
Local political trust	0.59	0.58	0.00	1.00	0.19	0.51	4	2692	Dissatisfied	Satisfied
Party non–participation	0.16	–	0.00	1.00	–	–	1	2626	Party voted for did participate	Party voted for did not participate
Gender = Male	0.67	–	0.00	1.00	–	–	1	3041	Female	Male
Year of birth	0.55	0.53	0.00	1.00			1	3041	1900	1998
Density = Urban	0.16	–	0.00	1.00	–	–	1	3041	Rural	Urban
Education level = Higher	0.43	–	0.00	1.00	–	–	1	3018	Lower and middle	Higher

5. Results

Six models are presented in Tables 4 and 5, the first four concern the DLES and the last two the RNP. The first two DLES models do not control for the three opinion control variables, while the second two do. For each of these options (RNP, DLES with and without the opinion items), separate models were run with the national and local political trust variables included separately in the first model and the second combines them.

The first hypothesis is the political trust hypothesis. The core idea is that voters who do not trust national politicians are more likely to vote for local parties. There is a strong negative relationship between the likelihood of voting for a local party and national political trust in each of the three models (both the DLES and RNP models). Those who trust national politics most are 93–95% less likely to vote for local parties, compared to those who have least trust in national politics. The relationship between local political

Table 4. Logistic regressions models based on DLES.

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Intercept	−0.93	−0.96	−1.50*	−1.60*
	(0.63)	(0.62)	(0.83)	(0.81)
Local identification	0.56	0.62	0.66	0.74*
	(0.41)	(0.40)	(0.43)	(0.44)
Political trust	–	−2.71***	–	−2.14***
		(0.49)		(0.57)
National political trust	−3.05***	–	−2.73***	–
	(0.54)		(0.59)	
Local political trust	0.21	–	0.41	–
	(0.56)		(0.61)	
Economic item	–	–	0.17	0.34
			(0.52)	(0.52)
New cultural scale	–	–	−1.04**	−1.19***
			(0.44)	(0.44)
Old cultural scale	–	–	0.92***	0.91***
			(0.33)	(0.32)
Support for local autonomy	1.68*	1.75**	1.64*	1.72*
	(0.87)	(0.87)	(0.91)	(0.90)
Party non-participation	1.50***	1.62***	1.55***	1.66***
	(0.22)	(0.22)	(0.25)	(0.25)
Gender = Male	−0.09	−0.05	−0.00	0.03
	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.17)	(0.17)
Year of birth	−0.12	−0.26	−0.17	−0.29
	(0.46)	(0.45)	(0.51)	(0.51)
Density = G4[a]	−1.36***	−1.33***	−1.33***	−1.33***
	(0.32)	(0.31)	(0.33)	(0.33)
Density = G41[a]	−1.24***	−1.25***	−1.28***	−1.29***
	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.22)	(0.23)
Density = Rural[a]	−0.16	−0.14	−0.19	−0.15
	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.24)	(0.24)
Education level = Higher	0.09	0.02	0.20	0.17
	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.19)	(0.19)
N	1084	1084	960	960
AIC	1013	1028	897	907

[a]Reference category: 'other'

Table 5. Logistic regressions models based on RNP.

Variable	Model 5	Model 6
Intercept	−0.95**	−0.49
	(0.39)	(0.38)
Regional identification	0.25	0.51**
	(0.26)	(0.26)
Political trust	–	−2.59***
		(0.35)
National political trust	−3.24***	–
	(0.32)	
Local political trust	0.76***	–
	(0.33)	
Party non-participation	0.45***	0.49***
	(0.14)	(0.14)
Gender = Male	−0.08	−0.03
	(0.12)	(0.12)
Year of birth	0.41	0.31
	(0.52)	(0.51)
Density = G41[a]	0.17	0.21
	(0.19)	(0.16)
Density = Rural[a]	−0.06	−0.22
	(0.16)	(0.19)
Education level = Higher	−0.12	−0.18
	(0.12)	(0.11)
N	2102	2102
AIC	2014	2071

trust and voting for local parties is not significant in DLES model but is significant in the RNP model, but both are in the same direction. If we combined national and local political trust, those who have the most trust in politics in general are 88–95% less likely to vote for local parties, compared to those who have least trust in politics. These results clearly show that those who have less faith in politics are more likely to vote for independent local parties, as hypothesised.

The next two hypotheses concern localism. This is split into two dimensions: local autonomy and local identification. First, local autonomy hypothesis is examined. This can only be tested in the DLES. In each of DLES models there is a significant result (but three out of four are only significant at the 0.1 level): those who want more municipal autonomy than they perceive to be the case support independent local parties more than those who are satisfied with the level of autonomy. They are about five times more likely to vote for an independent local party. The local autonomy hypothesis is corroborated but out of all corroborated hypotheses, evidence is weakest here. Second, local identification is studied. The core idea is that voters who identify more with their own region are more likely to vote for a local party. The evidence here is weak. Significant patterns (in the expected direction) are only found in one of the DLES models and one of the RNP models. These results are only significant at the 0.1 level. In these models those who have the strongest local identification are 67–109% more likely to vote for an independent local party compared

to those who have the weakest local identification. To understand the weakness of these results it is useful to delve into the operationalisations: in the DLES three items concerning identification with one's village or district, municipality and one's region. In Appendix 3, the three items included in the identification scale are included in separate analyses. Here, one can see that out of three options identifying with one's village is significantly correlated to voting for an independent local party. This is interesting because when smaller municipalities were merged into larger municipalities in the Netherlands, independent local parties were formed to defend the interests of the villages amalgamated into these municipalities (Janssen and Korsten 2003). These voters may vote because they want a party that serves the need of the local community they identify, but this is not the municipality. In the RNP identification is measured as provincial versus national identification. In Appendix 4, voting for a local list of the provincially active Frisian National Party (*Fryske Nasjonale Partij*, FNP) is included in the dependent variable. In that case, provincial identification has a clear effect on voting for 'independent parties'. All in all, there is insufficient evidence to support the notion that those who identify more with their municipality tend to vote for more local parties than those who do not, rather for as far as there is a relation with subnational identification, it appears to be those who identify with either their province or their village.

The fourth hypothesis is the supply-side hypothesis. The underlying idea is that voters who prefer parties that do not run in the municipal elections in their municipality are more likely to vote for a local party. There is ample support for this in the RNP and DLES. The difference between the strength in the relationships is linked to the differences in the measurement. In the RNP, the value is either one or zero, depending on whether the party one voted for in the national elections participated in the municipal elections. In the DLES, the value ranges from zero to one, depending on in how many municipalities in the party one voted for in the national elections participated. The analysis in the RNP indicates that voting for a party in the national elections that does run in the municipal elections in one's municipality makes one 56–63% more likely to vote for an independent local party compared to voting for a party that does run in the municipal election. The analysis in the DLES shows that those who vote for a party that runs in municipal elections the least are four to five times more likely to vote for an independent local party compared to those who vote a party that runs in municipal elections the most. The results are weaker in the RNP than in the DLES, implying that perhaps the effect of the non-participation is not the same for every party. The parties that participate in municipal elections the least are the pensioners' party 50Plus, the Freedom Party and the Party for the Animals. In the Models 1 and 2 in the Appendix 3, one can see that voters who voted for these parties are far more likely to vote for an independent local party than those who voted for the parties that are next in the list (the small Christian parties SGP and ChristianUnion). The results show

that in line with the expectations that those who voted for a national party that did not run in the municipal elections in their municipality, are more likely to vote for an independent local party than those who voted for a national party that does run in their municipality.

Finally, there are the control variables: first, municipal size. In the analysis on the DLES there is a consistent relationship: there is less support for independent local parties in the largest 41 municipalities compared to the other rural and in-between municipalities. The support declines by almost 80% when comparing the largest four municipalities with rural municipalities. This pattern is not present in the RNP data, perhaps because there are only a limited number of large municipalities in the less sparsely populated Northern three provinces. In none of the analyses, there is a relationship between gender, year of birth and education level. Three opinion dimensions are included in the DLES. Voters of local parties are more likely to have progressive views on old cultural issues: voters with the most progressive views on these moral issues are two-and-half times more likely to vote for an independent local party, compared to voters with the most conservative views on these issues. This may reflect the fact discussed above that voters who vote small Christian parties in national elections are less likely to support local parties than voters of secular parties. The two small protestant parties only run in 13% and 18% of the municipalities. Instead of choosing for a secular local party, these voters may vote for a larger Christian-democratic party. This seems reasonable as these independent local parties appeal to floating voters, who freed themselves from religious communities (Janssen and Korsten 2003). Voters of local parties are more likely to have conservative views on immigration and law-and-order issues. Those who stand on the progressive side of this dimension are three times less likely to vote for an independent local party, compared to those on the conservative side of this dimension. This may reflect the fact discussed above that voters with more conservative views on immigration that are more likely to vote for the Freedom Party in national elections vote for local parties in municipal elections. Even in the model with the separate variable for support for the anti-immigration Freedom Party (in Appendix 3), there is a significant relationship between having conservative views on new cultural issues and supporting independent local parties. There is no relationship with views on social-economic issues and voting for independent local parties in general.

6. Conclusion

This article examined the reasons voters had for voting for independent local parties in the Netherlands. Four patterns that may underlie why voters choose independent local parties were proposed: dissatisfaction with established politics, a localist orientation, support for local autonomy and the absence of the party of one's first preference. If one looks at these factors,

distrust of established politics and in particular distrust of national politics drives voters to vote for independent local parties. Not being able to vote for the party that one voted for at the national level is a secondary factor, although this applies in particular to relatively new parties that have an anti-establishment orientation such as the Freedom Party and the Socialist Party. There is more limited support for the notion that these parties appeal in particular to those who have a localist orientation, although there is that voters who desire more local autonomy than they perceive to be the case support these parties.

The strength of the patterns that tap into (satisfaction with and participation of) national political parties compared to those that tap into local factors shows that the choice for an independent local party is mainly a negative choice. This is further sustained when one considers the appeal that these parties have under those who have more conservative views on new cultural issues, such as immigration. The rise of these new cultural issues is linked to globalisation (Kriesi et al. 2008): instead of turning to national parties, voters that desire protection from globalisation turn to independent local parties. The reason for this may be that because established political parties tend to take progressive positions on these national new cultural issues they have alienated voters from them. These voters sought for new options, also at the local level. This pattern is particularly notable given that there is a mix of independent local parties with different ideological profiles: including both left-wing and right-wing and progressive and conservative parties (Boogers, Lucardie, and Voerman 2007). Moreover, this is notable, because the extent to which these parties can actually affect these immigration policies is limited – although the items in the DLES concern policies that are within the remit of Dutch municipalities.

The relevance of this study, however, does not end at the borders of the Netherlands. As indicated above, the theoretical patterns of political distrust and non-participation of some national parties at the local level are likely to apply to the success of independent political parties or lists in the Nordic countries, Germany and Austria. Germany and Sweden are of particular interest, because for a long time these countries also did not have anti-immigration parties with a strong local basis, leaving space for independent local parties to mobilise politically dissatisfied and alienated anti-immigrant voters. In Austria, Denmark and Norway, right-wing populist parties have stronger long-term representation in municipal councils. Future research may want to test to what extent these predictions about similar countries hold. It may also be worthwhile to what extent the patterns found here apply to the UK, Ireland and France with candidate-oriented electoral systems and Southern, Central and Eastern Europe with their history of recent democratisation.

Notes

1. This analysis excludes parties that are organised in between the local and national level, such as the Frisian National Party (*Fryske Nasjonale Partij*, FNP), a party which is only active on the municipal level, is included, in the analyses in Appendix 4 this specific party is included in the analysis.
2. With exceptions for municipalities that have recently been merged or are expected to be merged.
3. This does mean that voters who voted for parties that are organised at the supra-municipal level as well as voters who voted for combined lists of two or more national parties are counted as voting for a local party. Respondents from municipalities where no elections were held in Match 2014 were asked to think about the most recent election.
4. The first group is formed by the four largest municipalities; these have more than 300,000 inhabitants. The second group is formed by the following 37 municipalities; these have more than 80,000 inhabitants. The next group are 'rural municipalities' defined by the CBS as having more than 500 addresses per squared kilometre. Note that there are only two municipalities from the three Northern provinces where municipal elections were held among the 41 largest municipalities. The municipalities in between the rural municipalities and 41 largest municipalities are used as the reference category.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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Appendix 1. Questions in the DLES

Item	Question	Answer categories
Local identification (1)	To what extent do you feel connected to your ward or village?	4
Local identification (2)	To what extent do you feel connected to your municipality?	4
Local identification (3)	To what extent do you feel connected to your region?	4
National political trust (1)	To what extent are you satisfied with the way democracy functions in the Netherlands?	4
National political trust (2)	How much faith do you have in the government?	4
National political trust (3)	How much faith do you have in the lower house of parliament?	4
Local political trust (1)	To what extent are you satisfied with the way democracy functions in your municipality?	4
Local political trust (2)	How much faith do you have in the municipal council?	4
Local political trust (3)	How much faith do you have in the local executive council?	4
Local political trust (4)	How much faith do you have in the mayor?	4
Economic scale (1)	My municipality should allocate more money to maintain social services.	5
Economic scale (2)	My municipality should build more houses for rental houses than houses that are meant to be owner-occupied.	5
New cultural scale (1)	My municipality should provide shelter for asylum seekers.	5
New cultural scale (2)	My municipality should reduce funding for arts and culture.	5
Old cultural item	In my municipality shops should decide for themselves whether to open on Sunday.	5
Support for local autonomy (1)	How much interest do you attach to the principle that the municipality can decide over many issues autonomously?	10
Support for local autonomy (2)	How do you evaluate the implementation of the principle that the municipality can decide over many issues autonomously?	10

Appendix 2. Questions in the RNP

Item	Question	Answer categories
Regional identification	Can you indicate to what extent you identify as Dutch or as [provincial demonym]?	5
National political trust (1)	How much faith do you have in the national government?	5
National political trust (2)	The national government advocates the interest of me and others in my municipality.	4
National political trust (3)	The national government represents the interest of me and others in my municipality.	4
National political trust (4)	Members of Parliament care for people like me.	4
Local political trust (1)	How much faith do you have in the municipal government?	5
Local political trust (2)	Local politicians advocate the interest of me and others in my municipality.	4
Local political trust (3)	Local politicians represent the interest of me and others in my municipality.	4
Local political trust (4)	Municipal councillors care for people like me.	4

Appendix 3. Additional Logistic Regressions Models based on DLES

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Intercept	−1.44*	−1.55*	−1.68**	−1.29	−1.40*
	(0.84)	(0.82)	(0.81)	(0.79)	(0.80)
Local identification	0.75*	0.83*	-	-	-
	(0.45)	(0.45)			
Village identification	-	-	0.76**	-	-
			(0.34)		
Municipal identification	-	-	-	0.27	-
				(0.37)	
Regional identification	-	-	-	-	0.34
					(0.35)
Political interest	-	-	-	-	-
Political trust	-	−1.84***	−2.11***	−2.02***	−1.97***
		(0.59)	(0.56)	(0.58)	(0.55)
National political trust	−2.69***	-	-	-	-
	(0.60)				
Local political trust	0.21	-	-	-	-
	(0.55)				
Political interest × National political trust	-	-	-	-	-
Political interest × Local political trust	-	-	-	-	-
Economic scale	0.21	0.38	0.33	0.31	0.33
	(0.55)	(0.54)	(0.52)	(0.52)	(0.50)
New cultural scale	−1.16***	−1.35***	−1.16***	−1.17***	−1.20***
	(0.48)	(0.47)	(0.44)	(0.43)	(0.44)
Old cultural item	0.45	0.43	0.93***	0.91***	0.92***
	(0.36)	(0.35)	(0.33)	(0.32)	(0.33)
Support for local autonomy	1.81*	1.92**	1.78**	1.72*	1.73*
	(0.93)	(0.92)	(0.90)	(0.90)	(0.90)
Party non-participation	-	-	1.67***	1.65***	1.64***
			(0.24)	(0.25)	(0.25)
Voted Freedom Party	1.45***	1.56***	-	-	-
	(0.33)	(0.33)			
Voted 50Plus	2.69***	2.80***	-	-	-
	(0.53)	(0.52)			
Voted Animal Party	1.49***	1.53***	-	-	-
	(0.55)	(0.55)			
Voted Socialist Party	0.86***	0.96***	-	-	-
	(0.31)	(0.31)			
Voted GreenLeft	0.24	0.30	-	-	-
	(0.56)	(0.55)			
Voted Political Reformed Party	0.27	0.27	-	-	-
	(0.72)	(0.72)			
Voted ChristianUnion	0.28	0.36	-	-	-
	(0.43)	(0.43)			
Voted Labour Party	0.16	0.14	-	-	-
	(0.31)	(0.31)			
Voted Christian-Democratic Appeal	−0.57*	−0.55	-	-	-
	(0.38)	(0.38)			
Voted D66	0.65**	0.65**	-	-	-
	(0.32)	(0.32)			
Gender = Male	0.01	0.04	0.04	0.02	0.02
	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)
Year of birth	0.00	−0.13	−0.21	−0.38	−0.34
	(0.53)	(0.52)	(0.49)	(0.50)	(0.50)

(*Continued*)

(Continued).

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Density = G4[a]	−1.41***	−1.40***	−1.22***	−1.35***	−1.33***
	(0.33)	(0.32)	(0.32)	(0.33)	(0.32)
Density = G41[a]	−1.39***	−1.40***	−1.22***	−1.30**	−1.30***
	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.22)	(0.23)	(0.23)
Density = Rural[a]	−0.17	−0.16	−0.16	−0.14	−0.16
	(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.24)
Education level = Higher	0.21	0.17	0.14	0.16	0.17
	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.18)	(0.19)
N	972	972	960	960	960
Akaike information criterion (AIC)	908	962	905	910	909

0.1 > * > 0.05 > ** > 0.01 > ***

Appendix 4. Additional Logistic Regressions Models based on RNP with FNP in the Dependent Variable

Variable	Model 5	Model 6
Intercept	−1.26***	−0.77**
	(0.38)	(0.36)
Regional identification	1.05***	1.28***
	(0.27)	(0.25)
Political trust	-	−2.11***
		(0.34)
National political trust	−2.98***	-
	(0.30)	
Local political trust	1.03***	-
	(0.32)	
Party non-participation	0.55***	0.58***
	(0.14)	(0.13)
Gender = Male	−0.12	−0.07
	(0.12)	(0.12)
Year of birth	0.31	0.23
	(0.49)	(0.48)
Density = G41[a]	−0.35**	−0.50***
	(0.16)	(0.16)
Density = Rural[a]	−0.08	−0.03
	(0.19)	(0.19)
Education level = Higher	−0.06	−0.13
	(0.11)	(0.11)
N	2051	2051
AIC	2179	2242

0.1 > * > 0.05 > ** > 0.01 > ***